

# **“The Human Right to Water and Sanitation”**

**Intervention of the Permanent Representative of the Plurinational State of Bolivia,  
Ambassador Pablo Solon**

**Speech: “The Human Right to Water and Sanitation”  
New York, July 28, 2010**

Mr. President,

Allow me to begin the presentation of this Resolution by recalling that human beings are essentially water. Around two thirds of our organism is comprised of water. Some 75 percent of our brain is made up of water, and water is the principal vehicle for the electrochemical transmissions of our body.

Our blood flows like a network of rivers in our body. Blood helps transport nutrients and energy to our organism. Water also carries from our cells waste products for excretion. Water helps to regulate the temperature of our body.

The loss of 20% of body water can cause death. It is possible to survive for various weeks without food, but it is not possible to survive more than a few days without water. Water is life.

That is why, today, we present this historic resolution for the consideration of the plenary of the General Assembly on behalf of the co-sponsoring countries of: Angola, Antigua and Barbuda, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Benin, The Plurinational State of Bolivia, Burundi, Central African Republic, Congo, Cuba, Dominica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Eritrea, Fiji, Georgia, Guinea, Haiti, Madagascar, Maldives, Mauritius, Nicaragua, Nigeria, Paraguay, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Samoa, Saudi Arabia, Serbia, Seychelles, The Solomon Islands, Sri Lanka, Tuvalu, Uruguay, Vanuatu, The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, and Yemen.

The right to health was originally recognized in 1946 by the World Health Organization. In 1948, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights declared, among others, “the right to life,” “the right to education,” and “the right to work.” In 1966 these were furthered in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural rights with the recognition of “the right to social security,” and “the right to an adequate standard of living,” including adequate food, clothing and adequate shelter.

However, the human right to water has continued to fail be fully recognized, despite clear references in various international legal instruments such as: the Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Racial Discrimination, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

This is why we, the co-sponsors, present this resolution in order that we now recognize the human right to water and sanitation, at a time when illness caused by lack of drinking water and sanitation causes more deaths than does war.

Every year, 3 and a half million people die of waterborne illness.

Diarrhea is the second largest cause of death among children under five. The lack of access to potable water kills more children than AIDS, malaria and smallpox combined.

Worldwide, approximately one in eight people lack potable water.

In just one day, more than 200 million hours of women's time is consumed by collecting and transporting water for domestic use.

The situation of lack of sanitation is far worse, for it affects 2.6 billion people, or 40% of the global population.

According to the report on sanitation by the Independent expert,

“Sanitation, more than many other human rights issue, evokes the concept of human dignity; consider the vulnerability and shame that so many people experience every day when, again, they are forced to defecate in the open, in a bucket or a plastic bag. It is the indignity of this situation that causes the embarrassment.”

The vast majority of illnesses around the world are caused by fecal matter. It is estimated that sanitation could reduce child death due to diarrhea by more than one third.

On any given day, half of the hospital beds are occupied by patients suffering from illnesses associated with lack of access to safe water and lack of sanitation.

Mr. President,

Human rights were not born as fully developed concepts, but are built on reality and experience. For example, the human rights to education and work included in the Universal Declaration on Human Rights were constructed and specified over time, with the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and other international legal instruments such as the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The same will occur with the human right to water and sanitation.

That is why we emphasize and encourage in the third operative paragraph of this resolution that the independent expert continue working on all aspects of her mandate and present to the General Assembly “the principal challenges related to the realization of the human right to safe and clean drinking water and sanitation and their impact on the achievement of Millennium Development Goals.”

The Summit on the Millennium Development Goals is approaching, and it is necessary to give a clear signal to the world that drinking-water and sanitation are a human right, and that we will do everything possible to reach this goal, which we have only 5 more years to achieve.

That is why we are convinced of the importance of the second operative paragraph of this resolution, which “Calls upon States and international organizations to provide financial resources, capacity-building and technology transfer, through international assistance and cooperation, in particular to developing countries, in order to scale up efforts to provide safe, clean, accessible and affordable drinking water and sanitation for all.

All resolutions contain a passage that we can point to as the heart of the matter, and the heart of this resolution is in its first operative paragraph. Throughout many informal consultations, we have striven to accommodate the different concerns of the Member States, leaving aside issues that do not pertain to this resolution and always seeking balance, but without losing the essence of the resolution.

The right to drinking water and sanitation is a human right that is essential for the full enjoyment of life.

Drinking water and sanitation are not only elements or principal components of other rights such as “the right to an adequate standard of living.” The right to drinking water and sanitation are independent rights that should be recognized as such. It is not sufficient to urge States to comply with their human rights obligations relative to access to drinking water and sanitation. Instead, it is necessary to call on states to promote and protect the human right to drinking water and sanitation.

Mr. President,

In our effort to seek transparency and understanding without losing perspective on the essence of this resolution, in the name of the cosponsors we would like to propose an oral amendment to the first operative paragraph of the resolution that would replace the word “declares” with the word “recognizes.”

Mr. President,

Before moving to the consideration of this resolution, I would like to ask all delegations to bear in mind the fact that, according to the 2009 report of the World Health Organization and UNICEF entitled “Diarrhoea: Why children are still dying and what can be done,” 24,000 children die in developing countries every day from preventable causes like diarrhea contracted from unclean water. That is one child death every three and a half seconds.

One, two, three...

As my people say, “Now is the time.”

Thank you very much.